

My Turn: Nothing civil about Oregon refuge occupiers' disobedience

Brad Powell, AZ I See It *March 14, 2016*

Throughout the illegal occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, I heard from some quarters that while people disagreed with the armed takeover of public lands, they understood the supposed grievances behind it.

In fact, not only did many of us adamantly disapprove of the occupation and the damage done to wildlife habitat and artifacts, we don't accept the wrongheaded attempts to claim national public lands for the state or county.

Sadly, it appears that some lawmakers in Arizona want to do with legislation what the illegal occupiers in Oregon tried to do at gunpoint: A state committee is studying the transfer of national public lands to the state.

The armed militants at Malheur ran roughshod over bedrock U.S. constitutional and legal principles and deeply held American values.

They and their supporters are ignoring basic facts. The national public lands across the West, including those that were under siege in Oregon for 41 days, were acquired by treaty, conquest or purchase from other countries.

The lands never belonged to the states. Court decisions from the early days of our nation's existence have repeatedly upheld the federal government's authority to manage public lands in the public's interest.

The occupiers contended they were speaking for the public when in fact most people want public lands to stay in public hands.

The latest [Colorado College Conservation in the West poll](#) found continued strong support for national public lands. The bipartisan poll showed that [65 percent of Arizona voters](#) oppose a state takeover of public lands. In 2012, Arizona voters resoundingly said "no" to the idea, defeating a proposal by a 2-to-1 margin.

Arizonans know how valuable public lands are for recreation, for healthy fish and wildlife populations, hunting and angling, clean watersheds and boosting local and state

economies. Outdoor recreation in Arizona generates \$10.6 billion annually in consumer spending and supports 103,700 direct jobs, according to the [Outdoor Industry Association](#).

When elected officials and others say they disapprove of the armed takeover of public lands but understand the militants' motives, it is clear to me that they are missing the real solution, which is more collaboration and engagement with the public.

Politicians who sympathize with the illegal occupiers' goal need to say what they'll do when managing the land costs more than the revenue. Will they raise taxes? Will they sell the land to the highest bidders?

Will they lease important fish and wildlife habitat for mining and drilling? Will they provide the same opportunities for public input that federal land managers are required to do when approving leases or writing new management plans? Will the state weigh the impacts of drilling, logging, mining and grazing on water and air quality and wildlife habitat, as mandated by federal environmental laws?

The people who took over the Malheur refuge, ran bulldozers over the grounds, tore down fences and rifled through artifacts don't speak for the majority of Americans.

The stories coming out about the turmoil the siege created in the nearby community of Burns shows there was nothing civil about their disobedience.

Instead of spending time and money on inherently illegal and unpopular land grabs, our leaders, in conjunction with stakeholders, need to work in collaboration with federal land managers in the best interest of our shared American legacy.

Brad Powell is the southwest region director for Trout Unlimited and the president of the Arizona Wildlife Federation. Email him at president@azwildlife.org.

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